January 3rd, 2022

Dear Chancellor Guskiewicz, Provost Blouin, and Dr. Barzin,

The past two years have certainly been tiring and challenging for our Carolina community. Throughout the pandemic, the University has gone through many phases, including a public health crisis in the fall of 2020, growing from its mistakes, and finally creating a “new normal” where students have been widely able to access PCR tests and provided housing accommodations should they test positive or be exposed to COVID-19. As the nation’s top public health university, our speed in adapting to the pandemic has been, at times, disappointing, yet we have held onto the hope that UNC has our health and best interests at heart.

Despite all that has been learned during this time, the University’s plans for spring 2022 are extremely reckless and disheartening. North Carolina and the United States as a whole are at the peak of the COVID-19 transmission and hospitalizations, yet UNC shows no indication of changing course, despite our peer institutions doing so. Furthermore, it is clear that student, staff, and faculty input have not been prioritized in the planning or decision-making process for the return to campus. The Campus and Community Advisory Committee (CCAC), whose explicit purpose is to review and strategize on COVID-19 plans, was not once consulted before spring plans were released to the public. In past meetings, the CCAC has expressed interest in a vaccine mandate and confirmed that UNC-Chapel Hill has the legal authority to enact one, yet a semester later it has not. While the University continues to recommend vaccines and boosters, vaccinated, and boosted persons still test positive for and spread COVID-19. Not requiring each student to test before they come back into classrooms is setting us up for widespread outbreaks, where there will be unprecedented positivity levels across our community. Additionally, the removal of quarantine and isolation spaces in residence halls means that students will have no choice but to be exposed to COVID-19, expose their roommate(s), or return home if they are able and potentially expose their families.

With these considerations in mind, below are action items that the Residence Hall Association is asking University leadership to take in order to prioritize the safety of our community:

1. Move all classes to be virtual for a minimum of the first two weeks of class. If UNC’s positivity rate is under 2% after this period, assess if classes can be moved to be hybrid or in-person.
   1. Recommend that students do not return to campus until after the two weeks are complete.
   2. For students that must return to campus, utilize grab-and-go for all on-campus dining operations.
2. Ensure that all classes after the two-week online period have a virtual option through the end of the semester. In practice, this did not happen last semester, even for students who tested positive or were exposed.
   1. Formally communicate the expectation that professors provide class mode flexibility and be empathetic to the evolving needs of students.
   2. Offer a reporting mechanism within the Dean of Students for specific monitoring of this expectation.
3. Academic deans are not public health experts and therefore should not be tasked with deciding class modes during a public health crisis. However, should the university decide to continue with this strategy, it must set a hard deadline for deans to decide so that out-of-state students can make their travel plans.
4. Continue providing walk-in asymptomatic COVID-19 PCR tests at the Student Union and reinstate the locations at the CURRENT ArtSpace + Studio and Rams Head Recreation Center. Encourage, rather than discourage, students to test frequently to keep themselves and the people around them safe.
5. Continue with current on-campus contact tracing efforts.
6. Continue to provide free-of-charge quarantine and isolation spaces in residence halls that are available to all students.
7. Require that all students, staff, and faculty receive the COVID-19 vaccine and booster if they are eligible.
8. Hold a minimum of 3 meetings with the Campus and Community Advisory Committee (CCAC) within the first 2 months of the spring semester and consult with the group to receive feedback on all COVID-19-related campus plans.
9. Require that all vaccinated and boosted students test once per week and all unvaccinated students test twice per week.
10. Require that all students, regardless of if they reside on or off-campus, take a COVID-19 test before returning to our Chapel Hill community.
11. Require that only KN95, N95, KF94, and double masking surgical masks are worn within classrooms, given the growing evidence that cloth masks are ineffective against the omicron variant, and provide students with a minimum of 10 of these masks.
12. Include hospitalization rates in the Carolina Together monitoring program.

This is not March 2020, yet this moment is the riskiest in the pandemic that we have seen. Simply accepting that students are bound to get COVID-19, placing individual responsibility on students, or underplaying the severity of COVID-19 for young adults are not acceptable responses. Unfortunately, the spring 2022 COVID-19 policies will have a more direct impact on residential students than any other group of students should there be widespread outbreaks. As the Residence Hall Association, we aim to protect UNC’s residence halls, our homes away from home, and to advocate for the 9,000+ students who live on-campus. Ultimately, we have the same goal as UNC’s administration: to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. Our community is counting on leadership now to make the challenging decisions that protect us and prioritize our health and wellbeing above all else.

For the Residents,

Residence Hall Association, 2021-22 Executive Board

